

Office of the

Board of Health

City Hall

Fitchburg, Massachusetts 01420

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EXTREME HEAT/HUMIDITY ADVISORY FACTS

While it is important to enjoy the outdoors during the summer, remember that periods of extreme heat and humidity may cause potential serious health effects.

Populations at increased risk from extreme heat:

- Older adults over 65 years of age
- Infants and young children
- Those with chronic heart or lung disease
- Those with chronic physical or mental disabilities
- People taking certain medications (consult your doctor or pharmacist)
- People who exercise vigorously outdoors (play sports, cyclists, gardeners)
- Outdoor workers (depending upon length of time and exertion levels)

Other risk factors include:

- obesity
- dehydration
- fever or infection
- sunburn
- alcohol use

Parents, coaches camp counselors and others supervising children should be aware of the health risks during extreme heat conditions.

Exposure to extreme heat can result in several conditions depending on severity:

Heat cramps:

- Often occurs in those exercising or working outdoors during extreme heat
- Signs & symptoms: thirst, muscle cramps sweating and increased heart rate

Heat exhaustion:

- Body temperature is elevated to 99° to as high as 104°C
- Dizziness, headache, irritability, anxiety, confusion
- Nausea/vomiting, fatigue, lack of appetite
- Muscle aches and pains, weakness, poor coordination

Heat stroke is a Medical Emergency:

- The body temperature is above 99°
- May have all of the symptoms above plus;
- Skin is red, hot and dry
- Rapid heart rate and breathing
- Delirium/seizures/convulsions/coma

How to avoid a heat related illness:**For the individual:**

- Stay out of the hot sun or heat.
- Stay inside if your home is cooler than outside
- If you do go outside, stay in the shade
- Limit activity to morning/evening.
- Avoid strenuous outdoor physical activity.
- Reschedule sports practices and jogging times.
- Exercise/workout indoors in an air conditioned area.
- Where possible, go to air conditioned sites (e.g. stores, community centers, libraries).
- Take a cool bath or shower periodically or cool down with wet towels.
- Drink lots of water and natural fruit juices.
- Avoid drinks that are high in sugar, caffeine and/or alcohol, as they can increase the amount of water lost by the body.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing that allows for evaporation of sweat.
- Wear a hat and use sunscreen (of at least SPF 15).

For others- what you can do:

- Control your pet's exposure to sun – limit time and provide water and shade.
- Call or visit friends/neighbors who are at risk, check on them 2-3 times daily.
- If you or a family member takes medication consult your doctor or pharmacist about any side effects during extreme heat.
- Plan ahead – ask for policies to reschedule sports events during heat alerts.
- Never leave children or pets unattended in a car.

For your home:

- If you don't have air conditioning, keep shades drawn and blinds closed.
- Fans keep you cool by evaporating sweat. Use fans in or next to your window. But remember that fans alone may not provide enough cooling.
- Keep electric lights off or turned down low.
- If you have a two-story house, keep the upper-level windows slightly open, to draw excess heat up and out.
- At night, if the outdoor temperature is cooler, open all your windows. If you have fans that fit into the windows, use them to bring down the temperature faster.
- Avoid using your oven.

Caregivers of children:

- Schedule outdoor activities early in the day before temperatures rise.
- Dress children in loose-fitting, light-colored clothing.
- Ensure that children wear a wide brim hat and use sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher.
- Keep children out of the sun between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.
- Reduce outdoor activity levels by choosing less vigorous activities.
- Provide rest breaks and a wide variety of quiet activities, including water-play, in shaded areas.
- Provide plenty of drinking water for both children and staff.
- Monitor children's comfort regularly. If children experience symptoms such as rapid breathing, weakness, headache or nausea, move them into a cool space and seek medical attention if needed.
- Never leave a child unattended in a car.